

TIPS ON HOW TO RESEARCH YOUR HISTORIC BUILDING

Clackamas County
Department of Transportation & Development
Revised 2008

INTRODUCTION

More and more people throughout Clackamas County have shown an interest in discovering the history of their house or commercial building. To assist them in their quest, the following tips have been compiled.

The first section, **What Questions to Ask**, includes just some of the questions that you will eventually want to answer. As you delve more deeply, you will undoubtedly find more specific questions that you want answered about your building.

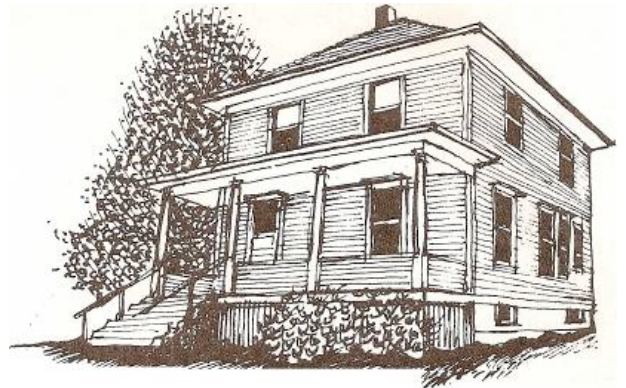
The second section, **Where to Go to Find the Answers**, is a listing of some of the places you might find information about your home or building. At the County Clerk's Office, you can look up all deeds which have been recorded for your property. These deeds will tell you who has owned your house or building. When you know who has owned your building over the years, you can figure out who was the owner at the time the house or commercial building was constructed.

If you don't know when your building was constructed, there are a few ways you can find out. Most of the properties listed in the *Clackamas County Cultural Resource Inventory* have an estimated date of construction. If that information is not available for your property, the architectural style may give you a good idea when your house or commercial building was built. Architectural styles usually follow trends that are popular for a limited period of time. (See *Historical Building Types and Architectural Styles in Clackamas County*.) Sometimes the deed will mention a building or other improvement.

Tax records can also be consulted to determine the date of construction. Early records of the County Tax Assessor show a value for land, improvements (buildings, etc.), farm animals and vehicles. More recent records only show a value for land and improvements. Look for a dramatic increase in the value of improvements, which could indicate construction of a new building. Tax Assessor Record Books before 1901 are located in the State Archives in Salem. Surviving records from 1901 forward are not readily accessible.

The third section, **Who and How to Interview**, points out the importance of information not covered by public records. Much of our heritage is passed on verbally or in family histories and scrapbooks. Frequently only the most basic information is available from public records or from documents found at local museums and archives, so it is necessary to interview individuals to find out about your historic building.

These are suggestions to get you started on researching your historic house or commercial building. If you run into dead-ends, don't despair. As with all detective work, you need an inquisitive mind and determination.



Four-square style

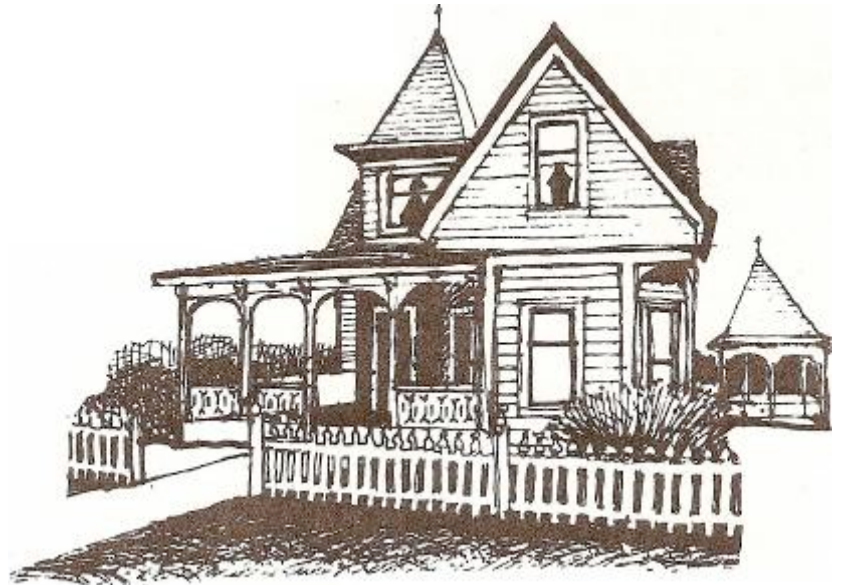
WHAT QUESTIONS TO ASK

About Owners (original and subsequent)

- Full name, date of birth and date of death
- Place of origin
- Nationality
- Occupation
- Family
- Civic interests, hobbies, associations, religious affiliations, etc.

About Building

- Architectural style (See *Historic Building Types and Architectural Styles in Clackamas County*.)
- Date of construction
- Building technique (e.g., balloon, box construction, solid masonry, etc.)
- Original use and subsequent uses
- Alterations and additions, including date of alteration/addition



Queen Anne Style

WHERE TO GO TO FIND THE ANSWERS

A. Clackamas County Clerk's Office

www.co.clackamas.or.us 2051 Kaen Rd, Oregon City Phone: 503-655-8698

Data: Deeds listed alphabetically and chronologically.

(This will probably be your first stop when researching your historic building.)

B. Local Libraries

Gladstone

www.gladstone.lib.or.us 135 E. Dartmouth, Gladstone Phone: 503-656-2411

Data: History of Gladstone, vertical file, Clackamas County pamphlets, access to I.L.L.*

Milwaukie Ledding

www.milwaukie.lib.or.us 10660 S.E. 21st, Milwaukie Phone: 503-786-7580

Data: Milwaukie newspaper from 1927 (currently being indexed by volunteer effort), City Directories 1920's-1940's, local histories, access to I.L.L.*

Oregon City

www.oregoncity.lib.or.us/362 Warner Milne Rd, Oregon City Phone: 503-657-8269

Data: Many local history books, Oregon Collection, Oregon Biographical Index, cemetery records, newspapers, census records, Sanborn Insurance Maps (see separate Sanborn listing), I.L.L.*

Lake Oswego

www.ci.oswego.or.us/library/ 706 4th Street, Lake Oswego Phone: 503-636-7628

Data: Local newspapers from 1925, vertical file, local histories, oral histories, restoration / rehabilitation, I.L.L.*

West Linn

www.westlinn.lib.or.us/ 1595 Burns St., West Linn Phone: 503-656-7853
Data: Vertical file, architectural style identification I.L.L.*.

Wilsonville

www.wilsonville.lib.or.us/ 8200 SW Wilsonville Rd, Wilsonville Phone: 503-682-2744
Data: Many local history books, Oregon Collection, Oregon Biographical Index, cemetery records, newspapers, census records, I.L.L. *

Also visit local libraries in Canby, Molalla, Estacada and Sandy, as appropriate.

C. Clackamas County Libraries

www.co.clackamas.or.us/lib/

Oak Lodge 16201 SE McLoughlin Blvd, Oak Grove Phone: 503-655-8543
Clackamas Corner 11750 SE 82nd Ave, Suite D, Happy Valley Phone: 503-722-6222
Hoodland 68256 E Highway 26, Welches Phone: 503-622-3460

D. Local Historical Societies and Museums

E. Clackamas County Family History Society/Museum of the Oregon Territory

www.historicoregoncity.com/ 211 Tumwater Dr, Oregon City Phone: 503-353-4475
Data: Museum and library open to public.

F. Oregon Historical Society

www.ohs.org 1200 S.W. Park Avenue, Portland Phone: 503-222-1741

Data: Vertical files, biographical files, business directories, Sanborn and other maps, local history books, Oregon Biographical Index, etc. Also try: www.oregonencyclopedia.com.

Note: Children cannot be accommodated at the library, and no books or documents can be checked out.

G. State of Oregon Archives

www.arcweb.sos.state.or.us/ 800 Summer St NE, Salem Phone: 503-337-0701

Data: Tax Assessor's records 1850-1900, death certificates, marriage lists, biographical files, County records

H. Oregon Genealogy Forums www.genealogyforum.com

I. Mt. Hood Genealogical Forum Library

c/o Mrs. Donald Burns, 950 South End Road, Oregon City Phone: 503-656-6021

Data: Donation land claims, census records, various family records, etc

J. Multnomah County Library

www.multcolib.org/ 801 S.W. 10th, Portland Phone: 503-988-5123

Data: Local history books, census records; phonetic index, local newspapers - *Oregonian* indexed, vertical files

K. Clackamas County Surveyor

www.clackamas.us/surveyor/ 150 Beaver Creek Rd, Oregon City Phone: 503-742-4475

Data: Original surveyor's maps and notes, other maps.

L. Marion County Historical Society

www.marionhistory.org 1313 Mill St SE, Salem Phone: 503-364-2128

Data: Extensive statewide photo collection, regional and local records

WHO AND HOW TO INTERVIEW

Former occupants and long-time residents can help fill in the gaps left after you collect information from public records. But perhaps more importantly, public records should be used to substantiate and document information garnered from these knowledgeable individuals.

Be prepared when you go to interview. Bring ample paper so that you will not be tempted to cram too much on a page or write in the margins. If you have access to one, use a tape recorder to "take" notes for you. Make sure you have fresh batteries and are familiar with the recorder's operation. Take a list of questions you would like your interviewee to answer so that you don't spend too much time rambling aimlessly, but be flexible. Your informant may have valuable information which doesn't seem at first to be pertinent. You might want to ask questions first about your interviewee (his/her age, place of origin, occupation, etc.), then ask about the general area you are researching (your town or community), and lastly ask about your specific house or building.

You'll be surprised how often you get your best information where you least expect it. Let your friends and family know you're researching your house or building. Soon they will be bringing you old photos, newspaper clippings and names of knowledgeable informants.



BUNGALOW STYLE

MISCELLANEOUS INFORMATION

MAPS MAY HELP

The Sanborn Fire Insurance Company was commissioned to map a number of cities and towns across the United States beginning in 1850 to determine potential fire risk. The maps focused on the commercial and industrial sectors, but residences were usually depicted if they surrounded business areas. This was particularly true of the earlier maps. Also, each successive mapping of a town showed more and more land area.

Microfilmed black and white copies of these maps are available at the Oregon Historical Society Library and the Oregon City Public Library. Original maps are located at the Oregon State University Library in Corvallis. The originals are color-coded and generally easier to read, but the microfilmed copies are quite usable. Copies can be made at Oregon City Library and Oregon Historical Societies.

Below is a list of what is available at the Oregon City Public Library:

- Barlow - 1893, 1922
- Canby - 1913 (two pages), 1922 (eight pages)
- Estacada - 1911, 1922 (six pages)
- Gladstone - 1917 (two pages)
- Milwaukie - 1928 (22 pages)
- Molalla - 1915, 1922 (six pages)
- Oregon City. 1884, 1888, 1890, 1892, 1900, 1911, and 1925 (includes West Linn)
- Lake Oswego - 1927 (13 pages)
- Sandy - 1922 (three pages)

TERMS IN DEEDS, ABSTRACTS AND TITLE COMPANY RECORDS

- **Grantor:** Seller. (Marital status should be clearly stated in deed.) First party.
- **Grantee:** Buyer. Second party.
- **Consideration:** Price paid for the land. (In most states, the actual price need not be stated; customary to recite \$1 or \$10 or "any good and valuable consideration.")
- **Deeds**
 - *Warranty Deed:* Contains covenants of title. Covenants contain certain assurances or guarantees by the grantor that the deed conveys a good and unencumbered title.
 - *Quitclaim Deed:* Purports to convey any interest at time of sale.
 - *Deed of Bargain and Sale:* Conveys the land, not just the grantor's interest. Does not include warranties of title. It is neither a quitclaim or warranty deed.
 - *Mortgage:* A pledge of property to secure the repayment of a debt.
 - *Lien:* A hold or claim which one person has on the property of another to secure payment of a debt or other obligation.

SOURCES

1. Kratovil, Robert and Raymond J. Werner, *Real Estate Law*, (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1979).
2. Brusseman, William B. and Leo D. Stone, *Real Estate Finance* (Homewood, IL: Richard D. Irwin, 1981).
3. Clark, Rosalind, *Architecture, Oregon Style* (Portland: Professional Book Center, Inc., 1983).
4. Blumenson, John J.-G. *Identifying American Architecture* (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1982).
5. Harris, Cyril M., ed. *Illustrated Dictionary of Historic Architecture* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1977).
6. Lynch, Vera Martin, *Free Land for Free Men: A Story of Clackamas County* (Portland: Artline Publication, Inc., 1973).

HOW TO PUT IT ALL TOGETHER

- Start organized and stay organized. Keep all the information you collect in one place. Many people put all their notes, photographs, clippings and letters in a loose-leaf notebook or scrapbook. This makes it easy to find all your work and it's a nice way to show what you've learned about your historic house or building to your family and friends.
- Be sure to store any original documents and photos in an archivally-safe manner, or keep scanned copies for yourself and donate the originals to your local historical society.
- Remember to thoroughly cite all of your sources so that you can retrace your information if you need to. Write down where you found your information, what page, volume, author, etc. Ask your interviewee where they came upon the information or who told them.

GOOD LUCK! HAVE FUN!!

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DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION & DEVELOPMENT

www.co.clackamas.or.us

Compiled by Jane Morrison 1986; revised by Peggy Sigler 2008. Clackamas County Cultural Resource Specialists